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CAMPING ON MANAGAHA

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Thinking

of camping on Managaha? You'd think it's easy but, nope, you cannot just sail to the island, pitch a tent, and call it a day. Managaha is a protected conservation area, so setting up camp on the island—even just a temporary one—requires a permit, planning, coordination, and prohibitions against hunting, fishing, and even feeding the fish and stepping on corals.

This edition's "Camping on Managaha" by Iva Maurin is an excellent how-to on getting things started when you want to experience the great outdoors and have a nearly deserted Managaha all to yourself (Now is a great time to do so when hordes of tourists are not there yet to spoil your Instagram profile photo). That is, if that's your cup of tea.

I'm afraid for us sedentary and introverted folk who prize the comforts of our homes, the only thing that could get us looking forward to camping is a zombie apocalypse, when we have no other choice.

Rustic amenities? Meh. Hot sun? Uh, no. Sleeping outdoors? Again, too hot. If I have to go sleep on an island, I will be bringing a posse—water carriers, a cook, Sherpas to bring the ingredients for a super barbecue, a go-fer to secure all the necessary permits, and a team who will play games, swim, and entertain—my TV in real-time. Glamping is my wheelhouse, so yeah, I can imagine myself camping on Managaha but I will be bringing civilization with me—a couch, pillows, bottles of body wash and shampoo, a deep-pile carpet for the ground, a large tent with enough room for about three bedrooms and two bathrooms, and a super-wide umbrella! I suppose bringing a portable generator won't be allowed. Y'know, for the mini-ref and portable aircon. I suppose I'd have to add a fan-bearer to the retinue.

Of course, don't let my personal preferences cloud your own judgment. If you believe communing with nature will sooth your soul and bring you nirvana, more power to you. We need more people with imagination who don't merely coddle their fantasies but actually make them happen.

And speaking of visionaries, this edition also contains a short feature on one such visionary: David Hood of Coldwell Energy. Mr. Hood, who moved here from California and has planted his retirement flag here, apparently does not believe in the idea of idle retirement. His company has already bought Marianas Coffee, which he envisions as an exportable commodity that could place the CNMI on the world map. He also believes the CNMI is ready to be less reliant on fossil fuels and is hungry for solar energy, which his company in California, Coldwell Solar, specializes in.

Starting off with the idea of educating the CNMI on the advantages of electric cars, Mr. Hood believes we are the ideal location for electric vehicles. With gasoline now topping $5 a gallon, I'm convinced already!

We hope you enjoy reading this issue of TAGA *Plus* as much as we enjoyed putting it together. For suggestions, reactions, comments, or criticisms, just shoot us an email at editor@saipantribune.com. BTW, that's not me in the picture.

Sinseramente,

Jayvee Vallejera
Editor

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COVER ART

Cover photo taken by licensed commercial drone pilot BJ Eddy (https://youtu.be/mydiGis7xwY) shows Managaha Island, which is nestled within the west coast of the Saipan lagoon. Mañagaha is popular among Saipan's tourists as a day-trip destination due to its wide sandy beaches and a number of marine activities including snorkeling, parasailing and jet skiing (Wikipedia).

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

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BEA CABRERA

Bea Cabrera is a correspondent of *Saipan Tribune* and a contributor for TAGA *Plus* magazine. In her feature on David Hood, she found him to be open, engaging and "like somebody we can be friends with." Hood moved for good to the island last year with pockets full of possibilities. With a solar business called Coldwell Solar in tow and big plans to continue to run Marianas coffee, Hood found his place under the sun to help save the environment and drink good local coffee while at it. Email Bea at beecabbie@gmail.com.

KIMBERLY B. ESMORES

Kimberly B. Esmores is *Saipan Tribune*'s crime and court reporter. Which explains why some of the things her new husband go through may as well be called crimes. Outside the beat, she tries to navigate her new life as a clueless housewife. Her hands may not be good for house chores, but it is believed they're satisfactory in other tasks. Like cleaning! (Get your minds out of the gutter, people!) Contact Kimberly at kimberly_esmores@saipantribune.com.

IVA MAURIN

From camping at the Desolation Wilderness peaks in California down to the Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary jungles in India, Iva has gone a long way from her first camping experience at the Hundred Islands in the Philippines, getting rained on inside her tent. In this issue, Iva gives a quick guide for the clueless on how to survive overnight camping in one of the best campsites in the CNMI—Mañagaha Island. Contact Iva at ivamaurin@gmail.com.

ROSELYN MONROYO

At one point in her life, Roselyn got into a fitness program and was pretty serious about it. That was around two decades ago. Today? Her fitness regimen mainly consists of running from one coverage to another and writing all about them and taking pictures and videos, interspersed with regular visits to her favorite restaurants. Contact Roselyn at roselyn_monroyo@saipantribune.com.

LINDSAY NASH

Lindsay is a writer and photographer living on Saipan. Before writing this piece, she read The Book of Joy by the Dalai Lama and Desmond Tutu, which says "our greatest joy is when we seek to do good for others." This brought to mind the people of the CNMI who always work to better the community. She knew this holiday issue of TAGA Plus would be the perfect place to highlight these volunteers in hopes to inspire us all to give back this holiday season. Email Lindsay at lindsayinsaipan@gmail.com.

MARK RABAGO

Mark is big Miami Heat fan because of Dwyane Wade in the past. Currently, his favorite players are Jimmy Butler, Tyler Herro, and ex-Heat guard Goran Dragic. He also roots for the Los Angeles Lakers. He grew up idolizing Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Magic Johnson, and James Worthy of the Showtime Lakers. Email Mark at mark_rabago@saipantribune.com.

JOSHUA SANTOS

A self-proclaimed home cook, coffee aficionado, and watch enthusiast, Josh is *Saipan Tribune*'s newest reporter covering education, utilities, the Commonwealth Healthcare Corp., and all things popping in the community. Check out his occasional front-page stories and photos in the paper, or reach out to him at joshua_santos@saipantribune.com or @rarebasedjosh on all socials.

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Did someone criticize your parenting?

How to react

ARIANNECOHEN
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Few behaviors are as triggering as someone suggesting bad parenting—your bad parenting. Perhaps a co-worker innocently wonders whether you ever cook home-made meals for your kids, or a teacher's email suggests that all kindergarten parents chaperone field trips.

You think, "Ugh, I'm a horrible parent."

Rather than looking at these incidents as infuriating, now you can look at them as productive: They probably make you a better parent, says a new study in the Journal of Applied Psychology. Researchers from

DREAMSTIME/TNS

Parenting leaves bruises sometimes, but also opportunities for growth.

five U.S. universities tracked parents and found that after perceived workplace slights about their parenting (in psychology lingo, those are "threats to parent identity"), participants invested more time and effort in parenting.

It works like this: Say a manager makes an offhand comment that threatens your sense of yourself as a parent. It may well be fairly mild, such as an earnest inquiry: "Don't you read with your kids daily?"

"The interaction just makes you start to question: Am I a good parent?" says co-author Rebecca Greenbaum, of Rutgers University. Why don't you read with your kids every single day?

"You're dissatisfied with yourself," says co-author Marcus Butts, at Southern Methodist University. This is not a bad thing. Humans are hardwired to want to feel good about the roles that we care about, and we instinctively protect those identities with a burst of action, the researchers explain. Perhaps you sign up for a weekly activity with your kid, or start cooking dinner with the kids once a week. And you pull back from work.

The effect is immediate. The study found that when participants' parenting was questioned, they felt more shame that day, did less work, and spent more time with their families.

The researchers have some advice for avoiding this cycle of guilt and shame.

Expect to sometimes feel like a bad parent

It's OK and normal. "There are potential benefits to shame, right?" says co-author Cynthia Wang, at Northwestern University. "It does lead you to focus more on your kids and invest more time in parenting." She suggests allowing yourself to feel all the feels, while trying to draw productive energy from them. Being a perfect parent is, well, impossible, and you don't want to shame yourself for failing to achieve the unachievable. Did the comment call to your attention an actual failing, or was it just someone preening about their own fabulous parenting?

See your friends

You already know that family and friends matter, but this time the argument is psychological: "Friends can allow you to look at situations more positively, and reappraise," says Wang. For example, when you're telling yourself that you're a no-good useless parent, a friend might intervene and provide perspective. Your own mind can't provide the same service.

Get therapy

The study found that those who are most rocked by these seemingly harmless incidents are more emotionally unstable, and feel more ensuing guilt and shame. It's unpleasant. Butts suggests avoiding this cycle by accessing whatever therapy, medications, mindfulness programs or other resources help you stay cool in stressful situations.

Zoom out.

When you feel like a bad parent, step back from your emotions. Big picture, it's OK to not be on Perfect Parent duty every day. "In life, we always have a limited amount of resources," says Greenbaum. "Day-to-day, it's OK to shift our attention—maybe you need to up the ante at work one week, and the kids don't get as much attention for a few days." You're a parent, not a martyr.

The researchers, by the way, knew to look into this subject because they have firsthand knowledge. "We all have kids, and all our kids play together," says Wang. "Working and trying to manage both work and parental roles can be very challenging. It was important to us to understand this dynamic." Mission accomplished.

Rate.com/research/news covers the worlds of personal finance and residential real estate.

David Hood

and his new life on the islands

BEA CABRERA

David Hood dons a Marianas Coffee cap, a new business he plans to pursue while he builds a life on the island.

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David Hood grew up in a farm, helping out his grandfather tend to simple farm things. He knew at an early age that when you work hard, you reap success no matter where you are. He eventually became a real estate builder and developer. He did that for 35 years and in 2010, he started Coldwell Solar in California, which supplies solar energy equipment.

He came to Saipan in 2013 and the dream of eventually living here never left his mind. In 2020, he made the big move—leaving his boardroom seat in his company in California and exchanging that with an Adirondack chair facing the Pacific Ocean from his Navy Hill home.

"I thought I found my retirement home and that is how much I fell in love with this place…I also saw potential in the islands," he said.

By potential, he means hitting two birds with one stone. Enjoy retirement and, while at it, make CNMI a better place and he believes it starts with putting up a solar company here called Coldwell Energy.

"The CNMI can be challenging especially now, but that goes for anywhere post-COVID. The key is to stay focused on the local needs and when the tourists come back, it just gets better. For me…I'm going to continue to push the limits on all things green and sustainable here in the CNMI. We love our beaches and the pristine waters, so let's do all what we can for today, tomorrow and for generations," he said.

Hood says he continues to look at cutting-edge technologies. "It's an exciting time for the CNMI, so I tell people to stay tuned. Coldwell Energy will be looking at ways to help the CNMI become more sustainable. That is beginning to happen now," he added.

Aside from bringing his own business on island, he recently purchased a long-time local business "Marianas Coffee," which he believes he can nurture, with hopes that the brand will help put the CNMI on the world map.

"I am a coffee lover to begin with and Marianas Coffee is simple. It's an amazing coffee and a great story. It's been here for almost 20 years and it's a local brand far, far away on a little island in the Pacific," Hood said. "Most people really don't know the whereabouts of the CNMI and the history of Saipan being a U.S. territory, so we will be marketing it to the U.S. mainland in next year. Our job now is to reach additional markets, including more of the local market here in the CNMI."

He pointed out that many people love that first cup of coffee in the morning. "We just need to get the word out that we are local company with a great product roasted daily here in the CNMI," he said. In fact, he already has a tagline in mind: "Coming to your favorite store soon; give us a try."

As far as renewable energy is concerned, Hood has a big hunch that people are actually hungry for it. "We just need to be more proactive here in the CNMI. Most of the population here want to see that happen. Change is hard and sometimes it just requires good old-fashioned persistence," he said.

Hood may have moved to a new place but he brings important pieces of his former life to Saipan. At the same time, he allows the island life to offer him meaningful lessons as well. "I feel at home here and it is hard to explain, to be honest. I find that refreshing and call this my home. …In today's world, people are always looking for something different and I think this fits the bill. …People here are friendly and kind. …I love the sense of pride, commitment and respect from the local community."

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FLORENCE ANTONIO

Mighty Man'Amko

At an age when people his age are more comfortable relaxing in their rocking chairs while reading a newspaper and sipping coffee, Florence Antonio is still taking part in local cycling and triathlon events.

Just last May, the 63-year-old Zambales, Philippines native outpaced triathletes half his age en route to winning the 60-and-over division of the Paupau 5150 Taga Triathlon with a time of 3:18:51.

That signaled a return to health of some sorts for the longtime CNMI resident—exactly a year ago Antonio was involved in a car-bike accident. That left him with a hairline fracture in his neck and compressed three lower lumbars.

As a board member of Triathlon Association of the CNMI, Antonio has been invaluable to the federation, according to TRAC president Manny Sitchon.

"He's…instrumental in the growth of our activities the past few years. He's very much our go-to guy when it comes to mechanical and electrical matters because of his background," Sitchon said.

Despite his age, Antonio can still keep pace with younger triathletes. "As a triathlete, Florence is very much capable to become a member of the Pacific Mini Games 2022 national triathlon team. When it comes to speed and time he can still compete. But he prefers to leave the slot to younger athletes," Sitchon said.

Sitchon said he and Antonio are the same age but he has yet to beat him in any of the races they have competed in.

Last year's car accident was just the latest of a slew of health issues that Antonio had to overcome to continue his active lifestyle. In late 2015, he survived stage 3 prostate cancer and in early 2016 he had two surgeries to remove part of his gallbladder. On top of that, Antonio also had to endure grade 4 internal hemorrhoids and inguinal hernia that resulted in five major surgeries in a 3 ½-month period.

On his way to recovery, Antonio literally relied on the sea to improve his health in what is locally called "Earthing and Grounding."

"I did water therapy everyday by immersing my whole body in the sea two weeks after my last operation. I did that for nine months straight," said Antonio.

Earthing and Grounding called for Antonio to walk or swim for at least two hours a day during his recovery period. "While doing water therapy I also silently prayed that God would heal me and extend my life further," he said.

Soon, Antonio was back to his exercise routine, which involved swimming 1.5 kilometers thrice a week, a 50-km bike ride once a week, and a 5K-10K run once a week.

"I also dieted a lot that involved drinking three kinds of natural tea (soursop, moringa leaves, and lemongrass) and eating a raw garlic and raw honey concoction. I also completely stopped eating fatty foods and now eat more fruits and vegetables. Lastly, I try to get as much sleep as possible everyday," he said.

Antonio first came to Saipan in June 13, 1982, as a heavy equipment mechanic and operator. He now considers the CNMI his home. "I just want to encourage people to live an active lifestyle despite your health issues. It's the key to a longer and fulfilling life."

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TAGA *Plus* Associate Editor

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Have

you ever camped on Mañagaha? If not but in case you ever want to, we've prepared this little guide to help the clueless little camper in you survive your first overnight stay on the island.

But, first things first! Here are some important information you need to know about Mañagaha.

Mañagaha is a little island area about 1.5 miles from Micro Beach on Saipan. It's a conservation area that serves as home to reef fishes, and as a nesting habitat for the *Lifa'ru* or wedge-tailed shearwater birds. As a marine sanctuary, the island is guided by rules—that is, no breaking or taking of coral or seashells, no fishing or spearfishing, no feeding the fish, and no walking on the reef.

Aside from being a conservation site, Mañagaha also holds a sacred significance for the Carolinian/Refaluwasch community, being the burial place of Chief Aghurubw, the master navigator who led the Carolinians to the Northern Marianas hundreds of years ago.

For tourists, a visit to Saipan will not be complete without a trip to Mañagaha. For many of us who live here, and who probably have been to the island multiple times, a camping trip to the island is something you wouldn't want to miss.

Ready to camp in Mañagaha? Here's how:

1 Get your camping permit.

To be allowed to camp overnight on the island, you need to get a permit. Only 25 campers are allowed per night—that's for both adults and children—and to secure your spot, you have to go to the Department of Public Lands in Lower Dandan, fill up an application to camp, and pay the camping fee.

In the form, aside from the dates you will camp, you have to specify what you are planning to do on the island. Are you going to swim and snorkel? Are you going to have a picnic? You also need to inform DPL how you will get to the island and, if you are going to charter a boat, the boatman's contact number.

The fee is $25 per night of camping, plus a refundable security deposit of $25, which you will get back only if you don't damage or trash the camp facilities.

2 Sail to the island.

There are many ways to get to Mañagaha for those who don't have a boat. You can catch the ferry, charter a boat, or even kayak. For camping though, kayaking to Mañagaha may not be best if you have a lot of stuff to bring.

The first time my husband and I camped on the island, we hopped on the ferry. In our most recent trip, which we did with six of our friends, which was just late September this year, we chartered a boat that cost us $15 each.

If you are going to charter a boat like we did, be sure to coordinate well with your captain—inform them of the dates and time you want to be picked up, how many you are, and the things you will be bringing so your captain would know what kind of boat he needs to bring.

If you can, go early so you could choose your campsite ahead of others, especially if you are going to be a big group. Once you get to Managaha, make sure to register at the Ranger's Station and be prepared to tell them how many you are in your group, and up to what time you intend to stay.

3 Camp and have fun.

CNMI rules and regulations say you may camp in any of the designated pavilions on Mañagaha, except at the following: the main exclusive concession area; the pavilion near the statue of Chief Aghurubw; and the pavilion fronting the pier. The designated pavilions have tables and chairs, and a grilling area.

There are plenty of areas to set up tents. The last time we went, we were eight in our group and we didn't have any problem setting up five tents. We have camped with even more people in the past, with kids, and camping has always been smooth.

Have fun! Swim, snorkel, play games, have a picnic, explore the island! Expect that there would be a lot of people during the day (although not as many before the pandemic!) but as the sun comes down, expect non-campers to leave.

And speaking of the sun, if you are lucky, you may experience one of the best sunsets in your life on Mañagaha. Pre-pandemic, they didn't have those Mañagaha Sunset Cruises for nothing.

Be sure to bring your own lamps to help you light up your pavilion once it gets dark. There's no power around, but the restroom—it's near the concessionaire—stays open all through the night. Campers are not allowed to start bonfires. If you're looking to have some campfire s'mores experience, there's the grill.

And as you rest for the night, you may hear some creepy crying sounds but don't be afraid, it's just the indigenous birds called *Lifa'ru*. Over a hundred pairs nest on the island each year, according to the CNMI Division of Fish and Wildlife. These birds are federally protected, so please help protect the by remaining outside of the fenced areas on the island.

4 Clean up and say 'See you again!'

After your day/s of camping, pack up and make sure you clean up. The refundable $25 does not give campers the right to trash the pavilions or any of the other facilities on island. Make sure there are no damage to the facilities, and properly dispose of all trash you made while camping. Once you're done, wait for your boat to pick you up (if you have chartered one), and say, "See you again, Mañagaha!"

Now know some basics to camping on Mañagaha. What are you waiting for? Just have fun and, as they always say, "Take nothing but memories and leave nothing but footprints." Enjoy!

TOP 3 CAMPING ESSENTIALS

Tent. Your home away from home. Your tent needs to be very reliable. At night, it will protect you from the cold (or heat) of the night, or just in case it rains.

Food and Drinking Water. Yes, you're going to be on an island surrounded by water, but can you drink it? No! So make sure you bring plenty of water. Hydration is key. You might find yourself engaging in a lot of activities, so make sure to drink a lot. Also, expect to go hungry, especially since you will probably be swimming a lot.

Clothes/swimsuit. If you're not prepared to go skinny-dipping, bring your swimwear. The restroom has showers that you can use after swimming. Freshen up after a swim, so you can have a good night sleep.

GCA
EAGLES
molten

AZRIEL FATIALOFA

Fly like an eagle with Mamba Mentality

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The expression "a man among boys" should be paraphrased to "a woman among girls' as far as Azriel Fatialofa is concerned, who recently played in the IT&E Interscholastic Girls Middle School Basketball League.

The 5'11" center of Grace Christian Academy led the Lady Eagles to an undefeated season en route to the championship. In doing so, Fatialofa averaged a hefty double-double in points and rebounds and probably even in blocks in all the games.

Azriel said everything she knows about basketball is due to her father, 6'3" Fred Fatialofa, a pastor at Hanom Lina'la Christian Assembly.

"My dad inspired me to play basketball and just seeing people play on the court really motivated me to play like them. Then I was recruited to join the middle school team when I was in fifth grade due to a shortage of players," she said.

Seeing that she has bright future in hoops, Ol'Aces led by FIBA developmental coach Elias Rangamar took Azriel under their wing.

The championship with GCA was a culmination of her and her teammates' hard work all season but Azriel herself admits the undefeated season capped with the girls' middle school championship hasn't sunk in yet. "It was a perfect season, honestly, and it felt really good knowing that we were undefeated all the way."

The title, however, was bittersweet because even before Azriel and her younger sister, Alyana, laced up for the championship game, their family received heartbreaking news: their uncle, Charley, succumbed from complications due to COVID-19. A few months before their Aunt Florence died from cancer.

"I dedicate my championships to both my Uncle Charley and Aunty Florence (my mother's siblings) who both passed this year from COVID-19 and cancer. Uncle Charley passed moments leading up to our championship game with Francisco M. Sablan Middle School," she said.

Azriel also thanked Ol'Aces, her GCA Lady Eagles coach and mentor Leah Fabila, and the Northern Mariana Islands Basketball Federation for her continued development in the sport.

Like ballers her age, the 12-year-old grew up looking up to the late great Kobe Bryant and to some degree her daughter, Gianna.

"Kobe's approach to just having a Mamba Mentality is what motivates me to never give up. I also am a fan of his Lakers teams. During Kobe's era the defense and teamwork…amazed me," she said

While she's happy making a high percentage of her shots from close range and her defense, Azriel admits she still needs to work on her perimeter shots, especially her 3-point range. She promises to work hard and do everything in her power to reach her ultimate goal in the sport—the WNBA. She also has trained her sights on playing for the CNMI national team in the future. "I really don't know about my future with the national team but right now my focus is on developing my skills and overall knowledge of the game."

Her advice to young men and women like her starting in the sport is just pure Kobe Bryant. "My advice is just to never give up on what you want, and to have a Mamba Mentality when it comes to practice, skill development, and game situation. Take chances and know that you will make mistakes or fail sometimes, but you learn from them and keep going."

Something to give, something to gain

Saipan volunteers provide inspiration, opportunities to community

The ocean elder who shares his knowledge of tradition and science. The master navigator who teaches others to sail each Sunday. A student who cleans animal cages. An event organizer who plans countless community events. A woman who volunteers to help preserve our local park.

These are just a small sample of the people who give their time to improve our islands. As the holiday season approaches, it's the perfect time to recognize those who give selflessly to the community, perhaps best described by the Chamorro tradition of *inafa' maolek*—to restore order and harmony, or to make good.

"We all have something to give," says Joann Aquino, director of Field Operations for the Saipan Mayor's Office and director of Community Service for the Saipan Rotary Club who was recently named the Rotarian of the Year.

"We all have skills," Aquino says. "We all are talented. We all have something to give back to the community."

As the holidays approach, it's the perfect time to take inspiration from these beacons of goodwill in our community, and follow in their lead.

LINDSAYNASH
TAGA *Plus* Contributing Writer

Master navigator Mario Benito shares seafaring culture through Sunday Sails

When Mario Benito's son was just 8 years old, he took him sailing back to his home island of Polowat in Chuuk, one of the states comprising the Federated States of Micronesia. As they spent time out on the water together fishing, he could see how much his son enjoyed the experience.

When Benito returned to Saipan, it wasn't long before the 500 Sails organization reached out and asked for his help in building traditional canoes. He quickly agreed.

Inspired by his son's love for traditional sailing, he also took it upon himself to introduce more of the community to his seafaring culture through Sunday Sails, a weekly program open and free to the public that offers free canoe rides and instruction at Guma Sakman every Sunday.

"I just want to show everybody what we have," Benito said. "I want to share our traditional culture with the new generation. I don't want this culture to die."

How to get involved

Sunday Sails take place each Sunday from 10am to 2pm at Guma Sakman. No reservations are required. Participants are encouraged to bring food or drinks to share. Learn more at https://500sails.org/.

SIS high school senior helps care for stray animals

Sean Lee has always wanted a pet. But when his parents wouldn't allow it, he found the next best thing—volunteering at the Saipan Cares for Animals rescue clinic, the perfect way to spend time with animals and help the community.

A high school senior at Saipan International School, Lee was required to fulfil community service hours. And when a friend brought him along to SCA, he knew it was a perfect fit.

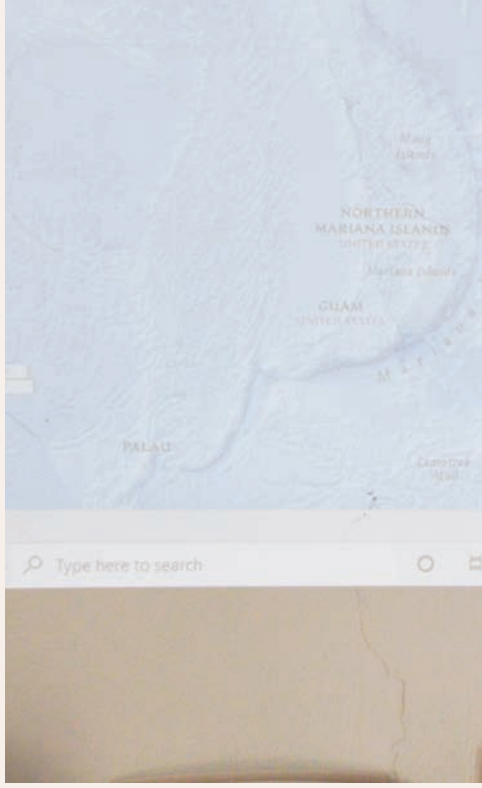
But it's become more than service hours for Lee. It's become a way to give back, spend time with animals, and learn what it takes to care for them.

Lee spends his time at the rescue clinic cleaning cages, feeding the animals, taking the dogs for walks, and more.

"At first, it was for my service hours," Lee said. "But then I realized I couldn't just finish the hours and then forget about it. It became a habit. And, it's fun. I love the animals. I even love insects."

How to get involved

SCA is a non-profit rescue clinic that provides low cost services to the Northern Mariana Islands and serves as the only organization providing medical care for animals in the CNMI. It is a dedicated group of volunteers whose mission is to improve the life of every dog and cat on Saipan through sterilization, medication, and community education. Learn how you can donate time or funds at https://www.saipancaresforanimals.com/.



Former Miss Marianas works to preserve park, environment and history

American Memorial Park was always a part of Shannon Sasamoto's childhood. She remembers visiting the grounds with her family, spending time there rollerblading, using the trails, swimming, and having picnics.

When she later served as Miss Marianas in 2019, she joined a cleanup with American Memorial Park at Smiling Cove. She and her sister volunteered, and that was when she learned about the Community Volunteer Ambassador position, which she now holds.

Now her volunteer work at the park supports environmental efforts and stewardship, including monthly beach cleanups, tree planting projects, the beautification of memorials and structures, and educating youth on the importance of preserving and protecting the environment.

"I think it is important to empower the community to know that the park and the land belong to them and their efforts make a tremendous difference in our wildlife and environment," Sasamoto said. "When we preserve our environment, we preserve our history in honor of our ancestors and their stories."

How to get involved

To see upcoming volunteer opportunities, follow American Memorial Park's Facebook and Instagram feeds or register to become an Eco Helper where participants receive monthly newsletters. This program strives to create a dedicated volunteer base to use and grow environmental interests and skills. Email amme.shannon@gmail.com for more details.

Ocean elder blends tradition and science to share ocean with students

Ramon Rechebei grew up with the ocean as his playground and his provider. As a young boy in Palau, he learned how to fish and began observing different sea creatures and their behaviors.

He transformed his early interest and upbringing into his professional work as a marine biologist for the then Trust Territory Administration on Saipan and later for the Government of Palau.

Now retired, he volunteers with Friends of the Marianas Trench Project HOPE program to teach island youth about the ocean, and does so by balancing the science curriculum taught in school with his traditional knowledge and cultural values.

"We love Ramon—all of us. The staff, the college students, and the sixth graders. He brings so much enthusiasm and thoughtful learning moments to Project HOPE," said Laurie Peterka, executive director of FOMT.

"Ramon's personal story of how he came to be a premier biologist among many other prestigious roles in our region is so important for all of our program participants to hear. I hope that it inspires both our college students and our sixth graders to know that he was just like them. That they can aspire to be the next amazing scientist or teacher or leader."

How to get involved

Project HOPE (Healthy Ocean & People Empowerment) is an educational collaboration between PSS sixth-graders, NMC Environmental Natural Resources Organization college students, and community elders. Learn how you get involved with the project or with Friends of the Mariana Trench at https://www.friendsmarianatrench.org/.

Rotarian plans community events for children

As Joann Aquino said, everyone has something to give back to their community.

Aquino, a former daycare center owner, has always loved children. So when they decided to plan an Easter event earlier this year for children experiencing lockdown, she quickly got to work to plan the Rotary's first community Easter Egg Hunt. It was a huge success, and that led to her primary role in planning the Halloween event at NMI Museum.

This is in addition to a long list of service projects she has participated in—from the McFun Run to the Man'amko Thanksgiving to beach cleanups and park maintenance projects.

As the Community Service director for the Rotary Club, Aquino's duty is to improve the quality of life for the community.

"When planning events or activities, I think about the Rotary's four-way test. "Of the things we think, say or do: Is it the truth? Is it fair to all concerned? Will it build goodwill and better friendships? And will it be beneficial for all concerned?"

And, lastly, she adds one more for herself: "Will it be fun for all?"

Aquino's passion to serve the community has been amplified through her work with the Rotary Club. The Rotary's motto of "Service Above Self" reminds her often: "We are not the focus, but rather our service to others."

"Community is important because this is where we live and community is everything," Aquino said. "Community is who we are, it's where we live. It's what we do. In order for us to thrive and survive, we need to do things together as one."

How to get involved:

Professionals ages 35 and older can join the Rotary Club. High school students can join the local Rotary Interact (International Action) Club at Saipan Southern High School, Marianas High School, Saipan International School and Kagman High School. Young professionals ages 18-35 can join the community based Rotaract Club, sponsored by the Rotary Club. Learn more at https://www.facebook.com/rotarysaipan.

Future voyages and unexplored horizons

NMC Proa has a new captain: Dr. Galvin Deleon Guerrero

Dr. Galvin

Deleon Guerrero is uniquely poised to create and cement an outsized legacy for himself as the newest president of the Northern Marianas College.

With millions of dollars at his disposal to rebuild the college after 80% of NMC was destroyed by Super Typhoon Yutu in October 2018, Deleon Guerrero will be the captain of the NMC *Proa* for the foreseeable future, and will be leading the college through a future that involves ambitious, long-term goals of strengthening NMC's buildings and infrastructure to withstand future typhoons and further expanding the college's As Terlaje campus and turning the area into a "college town."

This year, the college celebrates 40 years of existence since being established in 1981, and he said it was fitting that the college

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will be celebrating its 40th with a year of significant growth and change such as hiring him as its new president, a major accreditation review, and the adoption of the college's master plan.

"Those are pretty big things to commemorate a 40th anniversary: new leadership, new possibilities with accreditation and, most importantly, new facilities," he said.

And despite the COVID-19 pandemic that has ruled out most traditional forms of celebration, Deleon Guerrero is not letting that dampen his ebullient mood. "It's kind of nice that the way NMC is celebrating its 40th is with less pomp and circumstance, and more substantive initiatives; it's refreshing. We wanted to have a nice big gala and a number of things, but I think it's fitting that [the pandemic] forced us to focus on things that will mean a lot more for the next 40 years," he said.

When I did this interview with him, Deleon Guerrero had only been NMC's president for about three months after he came onboard the NMC *proa* on July 1, 2021. Since then, progress at the college has come at a rapid clip, the most significant of which was the

NMC Board of Regents approving a seven-phase master plan for the college in August.

That plan will see the construction of a new student center, additional classrooms, offices, and other learning facilities at NMC's As Terlaje campuses. The master plan—with its first phase beginning with the student center construction project that's breaking ground within a year—prioritizes "building resilience" into the NMC campus and developing the campus and the surroundings.

When asked what "building resilience" into NMC means, Deleon Guerrero said that, at its core, the goal is to ensure that NMC can withstand the effects of any possible typhoons. Upcoming infrastructure improvements that are part of the master plan will allow NMC to resume instruction following a typhoon as quickly as possible.

"The goal is to be able to resume as quickly as possible and return some sense of normalcy, whether that be making sure we have classrooms that survive, making sure we have utilities that survive, or making sure that faculty, staff, and administrators are ready to go," said Deleon Guerrero.

While constructing new buildings that can withstand 100 mile-per-hour winds is in NMC's plans, resiliency also includes many other infrastructure improvements, such as laying NMC's power and internet grid underground and installing multiple, more cost-efficient generators at the college to ensure it can withstand extended periods of power outages.

Speaking on what it means to turn the NMC campus and its surrounding area into a "college town," Deleon Guerrero cited universities around the world that serve as cultural, academic, and economic hubs for the cities these universities reside in. Part of the master plan includes pursuing partnerships with key public and private stakeholders in the Dan Dan and As Terlaje area, as well as developing and expanding Chalan Monsignor Road, spanning the portion of the road starting from the college and ending near the Iglesia ni Cristo Church.

"You look at any college or university across the world, not just in the U.S., and many colleges and universities are hubs for cultural activity, academic activity, [and] economic activity. In addition to investing in the economy of the CNMI by meeting the workforce needs, we can also support the economy by stimulating economic activity," said Deleon Guerrero.

"When tourists come to Saipan, one of the first scenes that many of them get [during the drive out of the airport] is coming over As Terlaje Hill to look at the lagoon. ...That's a beautiful drive, but it'd be great to continue that beautiful drive all the way to the NMC campus by [filling] the entire Dan Dan area with sidewalks that people can use, with crosswalks that make it safe, with landscaping that makes it beautiful and provides shade, and encourages our students, faculty, staff, and administrators to go down to [the NMC campus]. There are already coffee shops [in the area], there's a laundromat there, there are grocery stores. The businesses are there, we just need to create better infrastructure," he added.

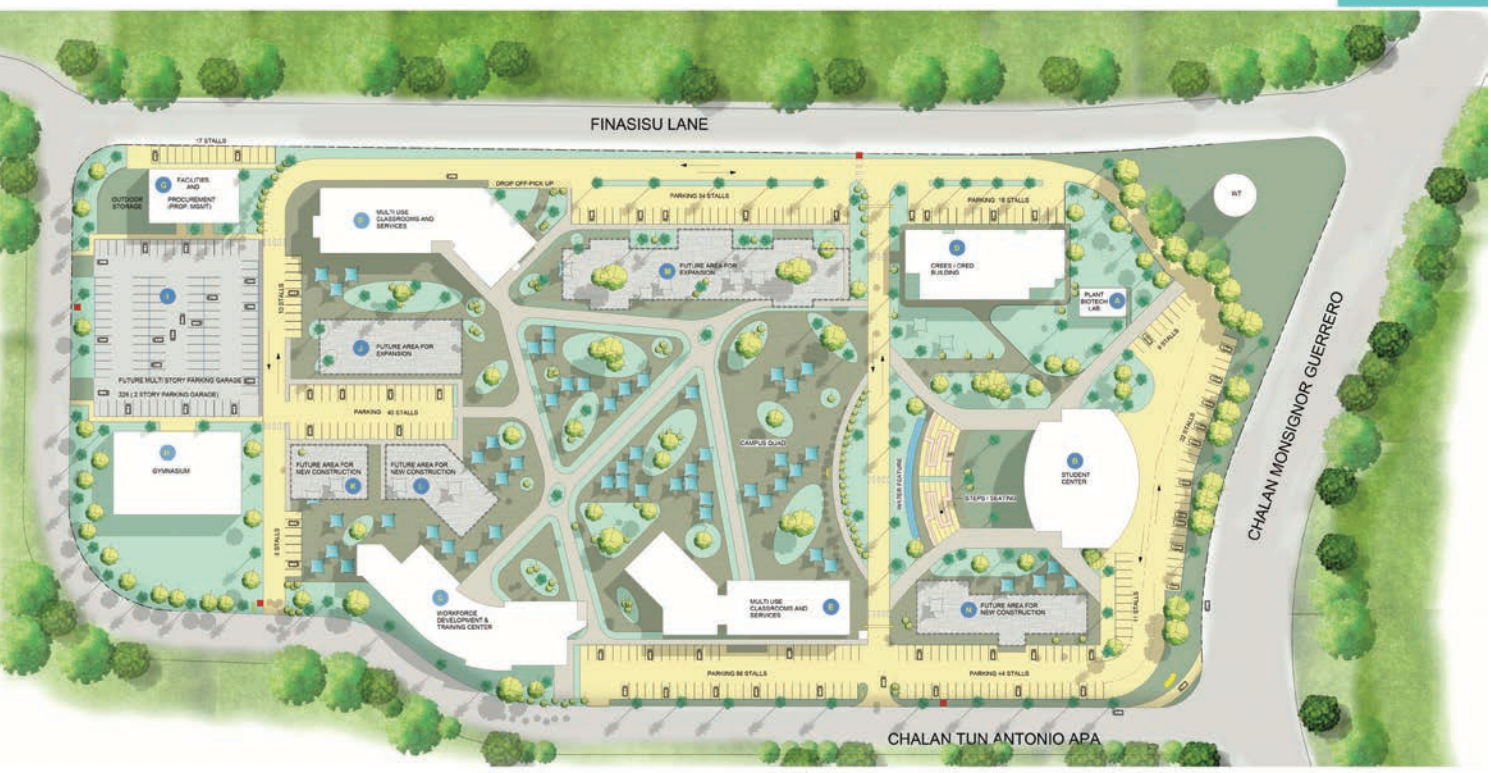
When asked about unexplored avenues for NMC, Deleon Guerrero likened the current state of higher education due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic to the current state of the entertainment industry as a result of the rise of streaming services. For both entertainment and education, the market has become increasingly consumer-driven—entertainment consumers and college students alike want their content on-demand, and to

VIII. CREATE A PEDESTRIAN FRIENDLY CAMPUS WITH COMPREHENSIVE SOLUTIONS FOR TRAFFIC, PARKING & INFRASTRUCTURE

IX. PROMOTE SOUND ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES AND SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES

X. PHASING IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

PHASE 02 OF THE FACILITIES MASTER PLAN **FUTURE EXPANSION**



consume that content at their own pace.

"There used to be a time where if you wanted to watch a show you had to be home at a certain time, a certain day of the week to watch that show. [Traditionally], if you wanted to take a class you had to be in the classroom, at a certain time a certain day of the week," said Deleon Guerrero. "But streaming platforms have flipped that on its head. It used to be that television used to be driven by the TV programmers; now it's driven by the consumer. We're seeing [a similar trend] happen in higher education with things like Coursera where students can log on, get credential training, and choose not only the class that they want to take [but also] choose the pace at which they want to take it and assemble their own set of courses."

On that note, Deleon Guerrero that NMC is working on taking NMC's current academic programs and repackaging the content into modules that will be more manageable to complete for students who may be off-island, frequently traveling, or working adults with full-time jobs.

"The same way that you might treat your Netflix queue might be the same way you treat your education queue. So that means not only improving our already robust online courses and programs but also redesigning current programs. ...On one end it's really [about] making education much more flexible and accessible," said Deleon Guerrero.

On the other hand, in a more traditional sense, Deleon Guerrero said he would also like to see NMC expand on its four-year degree programs and move NMC toward becoming a four-year research institution.

"Many universities serve as research hubs for major industries. Look at Caltech. Caltech feeds a lot into not just the tech industry, but also digital animation. Or look at the University of Chicago, they've offered some of the most pioneering economists of history, and the University of Chicago often gets tapped for economics. We need to do that for whatever our community needs," said Deleon Guerrero.

Currently, the college has NMC-Cooperative Research Extension and Education Services, or NMC CREES, to fulfill the community's agricultural and aquaculture needs, but Deleon Guerrero said he would like to see NMC's research capabilities further expand in the future.

When asked how it feels knowing that his time as president will have major effects on the college for decades to come, as well as what being NMC president means for him and the college, Deleon Guerrero said that it is an honor and a privilege and that it is an opportunity for him to take his passion for education and translate it into programs and initiatives that benefit both the college and the community.

"I've dedicated my entire professional career to education, not just K through 12 but also higher education because I firmly believe that education can make a huge difference in the lives of people," said Deleon Guerrero.

"It's such an honor and a privilege and an opportunity to take my passion for education and translate that into programs and initiatives that can help NMC do more for our community. It's already done so much for so many people, and there's an incredible team here. ...Education is all about giving people an opportunity to better their lives, and NMC has been doing that for 40 years," he added.

Deleon Guerrero pointed out that NMC's mascot, a *proa* or an indigenous canoe, is fitting for the college in that it is a great metaphor for how NMC operates as an institution—sailing into the future of limitless possibilities. "[It's] a great mascot that captures our history [and] cultural legacy, and it's also a great metaphor for how we operate as an institution," Deleon Guerrero said.

And he is excited about those "limitless possibilities."

M2 Fitness: Ge

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ZHANG LAOZHANG

t fit, don't quit

One of the challenges of getting into a fitness program is staying with it. For five members of M2 Fitness—a new player in the growing fitness community in the CNMI—they found reasons to stick with the program, citing the positive impact the group's health and wellness activities have created in their lives. As to where the name M2 comes from, well, it was founded by Mary Grace and Mishael, so two "Ms," quite self-explanatory.

Loving the new me

"Browsing through my two friends' photos with members of M2 Fitness in their inspiring physique made me wish to be like them one day. I had gestational diabetes with my three pregnancies, so imagine my struggle with weight loss. Soon, I joined the group and regularly attended the classes from Mondays to Saturdays, rain or shine. I lost 16 pounds during my first attempt to compete in the 21-day weight loss challenge. I was a bit disappointed when I did not win the challenge, but was more determined to keep working hard. I joined and lost again in Season 5. Then came the 45-day body transformation challenge, but I was hesitant to join after failing to reach my goal in the first two events. Plus, the new challenge means religiously working on my proper diet with consistent attendance in our workouts for a longer period of time. In the end, I went for it and I was named the grand champion. It was not an easy journey. It was not just a competition, but also an opportunity to help each other get better—physically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually—as many of us wanted to give up many times. Today, people see a new me and are surprised at my transformation. I am, too."

—ROSANNA LOPEZ, 39

Support system

"When the COVID-19 pandemic struck and I lost my job, I was under a lot of stress. It did not help that I was also suffering from constant pain in my left arm and had difficulty doing chores and trouble sleeping at night. Then I learned about M2 Fitness and their Zumba classes so I joined the group. I always loved to dance, but did not have motivation nor an opportunity to regularly do it before until I joined M2 Fitness. Doing Zumba with M2 Fitness makes me enjoy dancing again, helps relieve my stress, and allows me to meet new people, who eventually became my friends and my support system."

—ANNIE TAMPUS, 49

TAGAPLUS

Happier me

"Every time I do the M2 Fitness workout, be with other people, and with the coaches pushing me harder, it lifts my mood. I feel happier and better mentally and physically. I've tried many fitness programs before, but they didn't work for me; the routines were monotonous. Here at M2 Fitness, there's variety of exercises like cardio, boxercise, and dance moves, and I a happy to do them. At 58, I feel like my age is not a hindrance to following the routines that our coaches and the younger members of the group are doing."

—PAZ ECHAVEZ, 58

Energizer bunny

I work with small children from Monday through Friday, so just imagine how it feels like when I go home after a long day of dealing with active kids. Thankfully, after I started working out with M2 Fitness, my stamina improved. I still have the strength to do other activities. The regular routines plus the nutritional guidelines M2 Fitness instructors provide me and others allow me do intense workouts even after coming from work. No slouching after a long day, my posture improved a lot."

—DEBBIE ONG, 52

More than just a weight-loss program

Mary Grace Bautista and Mishael Pelicano, coaches and co-founder of M2 Fitness, said the group's mission is not just to help people lose weight. Every M2 Fitness training session, according to Bautista, has an intent to discover their next strongest self.

"Right when it gets tough, right when all the voices in your head are telling you to take it back, rest or quit, that's when we push the hardest. It's the choices in those moments that we build character, resiliency, and the capacity to take on the larger challenges ahead," Bautista said.

Pelicano added that every progress each member makes, even though its slow, inspires M2 Fitness coaches to show up at the workout sessions six times a week and help people achieve overall wellness.

Finding my groove

"I used to walk at the American Memorial Park with a friend at least thrice a week before I stopped because I felt like walking was not the right exercise for me. I needed a stronger workout so I joined M2 Fitness. On my first Zumba session, I thought I won't last the one-hour workout, but I did and it gets easier as it becomes a routine. I am proud to say that I can do all the Zumba workouts and strong routines now without struggling to catch my breath. At 56, I have developed a stronger stamina."

—DES CALAYO, 56

Tales of a clueless housewife and a 'fishy' meal

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Being a housewife is difficult enough but it's even more so when you're completely clueless. You literally have to learn everything on your own through trial and error, like the time I learned that store-bought fish, specifically *tilapias*, require gutting and removing the scales before cooking. From this alone you can already tell where this misadventure is going but let me tell it to you my own way.

I know I have shared some hard-to-beat clueless wife tales in the past but, I personally never realized how hilariously clueless I was until I cooked an entire *tilapia* whole, meaning guts and all! Up until that point, I told myself that the mistakes I had made were common mistakes that everyone probably made once or twice in their lives.

Jumping into our story, about six months into our marriage, my husband said he was getting tired of eating chicken and pork all the time and he missed eating fish (that was all we ate for six months). Mind you, these were the only meats I had ever known since I personally detested eating fish.

The next day, being the sweet, caring wife that I am, while my husband was out working, I decided I wanted to make his wishes come true and make him "*paksiw na tilapia*" for lunch (*paksiw* is a Filipino term used to refer to dishes cooked in vinegar and garlic). I merrily made my way to the nearest grocery store and I bought the largest *tilapia* I could find.

After making my purchase, I went straight home and wasted no time preparing the meal. I defrosted the fish, cut up my ingredients, and started heating up my pan. In my head I was all prepped and ready to start cooking.

You might be thinking, "She probably just didn't want to bore us with the details of cleaning the fish. Everyone knows you have to remove the fish's organs, fins, and scales, before you cook it." I assure you, you are mistaken. I didn't mention it because I didn't know that it was a requirement!

So, I went on with cooking my meal: I threw in the basics—onions, garlic, ginger—then I threw in the entire fish, intestines and all, because I didn't know any better, and poured in some vinegar, some water, covered the pot, and just waited for it to boil.

As I sat there on my phone waiting for my fish to boil, I noticed a weird stench coming from my pot. However, because I didn't know what the meal was supposed to smell like, I just let it be.

About 10 minutes pass and the smell just seemed to grow stronger the longer I boiled it. It smelled of ocean and blood combined. So in order to counter the smell, I poured in more vinegar in hopes of masking the smell. I don't know, this was new territory for me.

After cooking the fish for about 20 minutes, I tested the fish meat with a fork to make sure it was tender and I turned the flame off. Words could not explain the pride I felt for myself after what I perceived to be a successful meal and the excitement I felt about the surprise I had for my husband.

When my husband arrived for lunch, he was immediately filled with excitement because he knew from the smell that I had made one of his favorites. However, he was kind of confused as to why it smelled a bit too "fishy" but he didn't think anything of it.

So, I prepare a plate for him and I bring out the *tilapia* over on a plate—much like a cheerful scene from an old-fashioned '60s TV sitcom. But knowing what I know now, the *tilapia* definitely didn't look right; it was smelly, scaly, and just looked downright bloated. My poor husband knew right away that something was wrong.

I remember vividly when he cut open that fish: its guts spilled onto the plate like those candies with gooey, chocolate centers. Aside from the site of fish guts all over the plate that had me gagging, it was the smell that threw me over the edge. It smelled like somebody had died.

After throwing up, I took my poor husband out to lunch but both he and I could barely eat with the revolting sight we just saw.

To this day, whenever I think about that incident, I can't help but smile because my husband really got the crappy end of the bargain when he married me. Moral of the story: Whether frozen or fresh, you have to gut the fish first and remove the scales or you'll end up with a horror show on your plate that'll have you swearing off fish for the next few days.

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